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# THE LOOKOUT

MAY 2023

## Unit: Lamentations

### Theme: God-Given Grief

**Overview:** Not all grief is bad. There are redemptive tears. Sometimes hurting helps. The first word in Lamentations is “How” (*ekah*). We often ask, “How did this happen?” when we are in pain. Lamentations is attributed to Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. It is a tightly woven poetic piece that is read by the Jews in Jerusalem at the Western Wall every week. It starts with lament (1:1-2) and ends with repentance (5:21-22). Students will learn of God’s discipline and punishment as well as how confession of sins and waiting on the Lord helps his people experience his mercy and faithfulness.

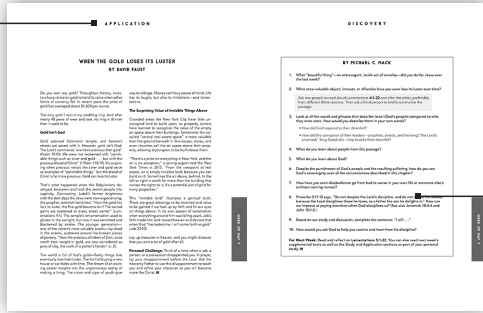
## HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MAY 21, 2023

**LESSON AIM:** **Confess your sins and  
learn from the Lord  
when God wounds you.**

**UNIT:** Lamentations

**THEME:** God-Given Grief

**LESSON TEXT:** Lamentations 1:1, 10-18; 2:5-14, 17, 20-21

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Leviticus 26:38-44; 1 Kings 8:33-36; Psalm 32:3-5;  
1 John 1:9

## STUDY

### WOUNDED

BY MARK SCOTT

Some great writers have used metaphors to describe preaching. John R.W. Stott used bridge-building as a metaphor (in *Between Two Worlds*), while Ian Pitt-Watson used dancing (*A Primer for Preaching*). But Chris Erdman used bleeding (*Countdown to Sunday*). Consider that Jeremiah was a living metaphor for the people to whom he preached, for he bled as he prophesied to them. And that fits, for Isaiah said of the Messiah—the greatest preacher ever—that by his stripes we would be healed (Isaiah 53:5).

The book of Lamentations is a bit like reading the Song of Songs—i.e., it isn't always clear who is speaking. In the case of Lamentations, is it the Lord? Is it the Lord through the prophet? Is it the people? Is it the people speaking through the prophet? In this early section of Lamentations, the people seem to be speaking (lamenting) through the prophet.

#### The Wounds of the Lord

*Lamentations 1:1, 10-18; 2:10-14*

Wounds hurt. The people confessed as much. One wound was that of feeling deserted (1:1). The deportation of people to Babylon depleted Jerusalem's population. The city formerly was bursting with life. But this opening verse described it as a *widow*. (By the way, the Hebrew word for *widow* means deserted or silent.) At one point, Jerusalem was *great among the nations* on the order of a *queen*. But after its fall, it was more like a *slave* than a *queen*.

Another wound arose from the desecration of the city and temple (1:10). Babylon had stolen Jerusalem's *treasures*. They had even entered the *sanctuary* (holy place in the temple). That place, of course, was reserved for specially designated priests. That incursion made the Jews feel violated at the point of their faith.

Another wound was starvation (1:11). Besiegement is a terrible way to die. The people searched for bread anywhere and everywhere. They sold valuable treasures to *keep themselves alive*. Food is a powerful motivator, and we can feel *despised* when we do not have it.

Another wound emerged from the rejection of God's people (1:12-18). This is a long and involved section.

When we suffer (experience sorrow, grief, or pain), we feel rejected. It feels as if we are experiencing the *fierce*

*anger* of God. Three metaphors—fire, hunting, and being yoked—drive home this feeling of sorrow. The people felt as if they had fire in their bones (cf. Jeremiah 20:9) and as if someone had set a trap for them. Their strength was *sapped* by having to wear an uncomfortable *yoke* from their enemies. These enemies made war against God's people, crushed the young men, and caused the people to *overflow with tears*. The people, in fact, could not keep from weeping (2:11). God was using his enemies against his own people, and, worst of all, sending his people into exile.

Another wound was compromised leadership (2:10). The *elders* of the people could do nothing but sit *on the ground in silence* and be contrite. Young women bowed their heads in shame. Children and infants *fainted*. Mothers could not find food for their young. Prophets prophesied falsely. Face it, their wounds were *as deep as the sea*.

#### The Lord of the Wounds

*Lamentations 2:5-9, 17, 20-21*

The Lord acts like a physician who must hurt the patient to produce healing. He seems violent, but the Lord knows something about wounds, and he knows how redemptive they can be. It almost seemed that the Lord was the *enemy* (a national foe) of Israel. He *swallowed* them up, destroyed their strongholds, and multiplied their *lamentation* (2:5).

The Lord made the people into a tilled garden, messed with their religious ceremonies, and took out their leaders. He rejected the very altar he had consecrated. He exposed the people by allowing their walls (protection) to be taken away. The *ramparts and walls* were removed. The *gates* and the *bars* were taken out. The law of the Lord was no more, and the prophets were receiving no new visions from him.

The Lord of the wounds did exactly what he said he would do. Wrongdoing in his universe would be punished. He had no pity. He allowed enemies to gloat over Israel . . . he even exalted their power. Women were eating their young, leaders were being killed in the temple, and young and old were dying *by the sword*.

Jeremiah had one plea. "*Look, Lord, and consider: Whom have you ever treated like this?*" The only escape from the wounds of the Lord is to confess your sins to the Lord of the wounds. ■

## APPLICATION

### WE'RE MEANT TO LAMENT

BY DAVID FAUST

Our youth minister purchased a new Bible for every high school senior in our youth group. Before giving the Bibles as graduation gifts, he asked several friends to highlight favorite verses and write encouraging Post-it notes to stick inside the Bibles. I noticed that the dark, sad book of Lamentations didn't get a lot of Post-it notes! Most of us prefer celebrations over lamentations.

And yet, "Jeremiah composed laments" (2 Chronicles 35:25)—sad songs grieving the death of King Josiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the sin that led to the city's downfall. The book of Lamentations is an acrostic poem where the verses begin with consecutive letters of the alphabet. Jeremiah wept "from A to Z," comparing the fallen city of Jerusalem to a grieving widow whose "eyes overflow with tears" (Lamentations 1:1-2, 16).

Hebrew poetry includes both praise and lament. Praise celebrates what God has done. Lament cries out to God in the midst of pain. Both sides of that equation are important. We're meant to lament. If we skip too quickly to the happy side of things, we miss the lessons we can learn from grief. Before we celebrate Easter, it's healthy to lament on Good Friday. If we're open to its instruction, sorrow has a lot to teach us.

#### Different Kinds of Grief

Sadness comes in different forms. *Brief grief* hurts for a while, but as time passes we eventually get over it. *Extended grief* lasts a long time as we deal with the death of a loved one or recover from a devastating loss of money, health, a job, or a relationship. Someone has said, "Sadness is the soul's way of saying 'this mattered.'" C. S. Lewis wrote, "The greater the love, the greater the grief, and the stronger the faith the more savagely will Satan storm its fortress."

Have you experienced the *sorrow of repentance*? "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). *Individual grief* comes from repenting over our own personal sin, and *group grief* comes when a family, congregation, or even

a nation goes through sorrow together. When Jonah preached, the whole city of Nineveh repented, including the king. The 9/11 terror attacks made the whole world grieve.

And let's not forget about *God's grief*. Jesus the Messiah was acquainted with grief.

He knows how it feels to have a broken heart. He sympathizes with our sorrow.

#### Good Grief

*Grief is good when it pulls people together.* In sports, adversity can make individual athletes play better as a team. Trust and cooperation can grow deeper when family members and coworkers face difficulties together and learn to "rejoice with those who rejoice [and] weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15, *English Standard Version*).

*Grief is good when it draws us toward God.* Grief can make us bitter, or it can make us better. Pushing God away doesn't relieve grief. "Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?" (Lamentations 2:13). Only God can.

The trailer of a movie shows just enough highlights to pique our interest. To get the whole story, we need to watch the whole movie. In life, we see short glimpses. Only God sees the whole picture. Whatever grief you are facing, the Bible extends this gracious invitation: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

**Personal Challenge:** What makes you sad? What emotional wounds are breaking your heart? In prayer, tell the Lord about your sorrow and ask him to heal your wounds.

**Optional Challenge:** Do you know someone who is dealing with grief? Write them a note, take them out for lunch or coffee, or find some other practical way to encourage them and show you care. ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you find hope amid your circumstances over the past week?
2. How have you seen God redeem wounds, pain, and grief in your life or the lives of others?

Ask two people to read aloud **Lamentations 1:1, 10-18; 2:5-14, 17, 20-21** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. What wounds and suffering were the Israelites experiencing?
  - In what ways did God directly and indirectly (through the Babylonian captivity, besiegement, and deportment) punish the people for their defiance and disobedience?
  - Imagine how these people, God's covenant people, must have felt with so much taken away from them: their homes, their city, their way of life and ability to worship God in his sanctuary, their ability to fix the situation, their loved ones, God's comfort, their morality, and much more. In what ways can you empathize with them? How would you respond?
4. What do you learn about people from this passage?
5. What do you learn about God?
6. What warnings can we take from this passage for today and the future?
7. How is confession (see 1:14, 18) and repentance involved in healing?
8. "Your wound is as deep as the sea. Who can heal you?" (2:13). How would you use this passage and especially that verse to tell someone about God's goodness and grace?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What healing do you need from God right now?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Lamentations 3:19-33, 39-42, 55-58**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■